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ABSTRACT

An analysis of data from two studies and reviews of selected literature are used to describe (1) problems of decision making at the institutional level; (2) those decisions now being made at inappropriate levels according to criteria generated by the data; and (3) alternative forms of decision making, including change strategies. Data selected for inclusion pertain to the following areas: process of faculty adaptation of models for curricular decision making; organizational forms promoting wide teacher involvement in decision making; teacher attitudes about participation; small group norms, levels of commitment, and cohesion; and procedures, processes, and products typically used by faculty groups embarking on institutional tasks. (Author)

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DECISION MAKING AT THE INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

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This discussion of decision making assumes that critical determinations about learning and teaching are made at varying distances from the learner and his teacher; that the patterns of decision making which control the public schools do not differ significantly from school to school, state to state, or region to region; and that the processes of learning and teaching suffer because of the size of gap that exists between where a decision is made and the distance to the place where it is implemented. This report deals with decision making at the "institutional level" -- the area typically found between boards of education or legislative bodies, either at the state or local level, and learners and teachers. The usual participants are central office administrators and supervisors, principals, and school faculties when they operate as a group making school-wide decisions rather than decisions for learners working with individual teachers for instructional purposes.

Two studies, both of them "field studies," provide useful data for these considerations. The first reports the work of a faculty group as it made decisions about purposes for its school. In that study, conducted at UCLA's University Elementary School, three groups at work on a common task were observed. Three basic components of curriculum planning were examined -- (1) the *procedures* used in developing a statement of educational objectives, (2) the *problem solving tasks* in which they engaged and the roles related to those tasks, and (3) the *statements of institutional objectives* which they produced.

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A second resource for this paper is data from the six projects that made up the Field Studies Program of NEA's Center for the Study of Instruction. The purposes of that program included the development of attitudes among teachers which would help them be more active in their institutional decision-making roles and the building of concomitant skills, particularly those required to be productive in curriculum development work. These data have to do with faculty adaptation of models for decision making, varying forms of organization designed to cause wide teacher participation in institutional decision making, and a modified longitudinal study which dealt in part with faculty attitudes about curricular decision-making processes.

THE NATURE OF DECISIONS APPROPRIATELY MADE AT THE INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

In the CSI Field Studies Program* much attention was paid to helping teachers, principals, and other professionals sort out those critical areas requiring decision *and* to deal as openly as possible with questions of who should make what decision. Resolve to the question was different from site to site but there is enough similarity to select one project's response and claim that it is generalizable to the others involved in the Program.

One faculty group identified seven distinct institutional level tasks which provided (for them) the critical links between the societal and instructional levels of decision making:

> When broad educational decisions have been made reflecting the thinking of the groups listed under the Societal Level, school people

* In 1971 the Center for the Study of Instruction was unified with three other NEA units. This new grouping is called Instruction and Professional Development (IPD) and works toward one of the six NEA goals -- Professional Excellence.

will have directives for making Institutional Level decisions. Currently, the definition of places where institutional decisions are made and the groups responsible for them are:

District Level - All certificated staff or their representatives.
School Level - Faculty of a school or their representatives.
Age Level - All teachers of a given age group of learners or their representatives.
Subject Matter - All teachers of a given subject area or their representatives.

Serious consideration needs to be given to this definition. For example, there is a good deal of interest in involving student representatives in institutional planning. Also, there appears to be a growing interest in more truly representative citizen and community participation at this level.

The decisions (1-7) do not necessarily have to be made in the order listed. For reference they have been identified with numbers. However, we do feel that Decision #1 should precede any of the others.

1. Select objectives to meet identified learner needs.

Societal aims are too broad and far-reaching to be dealt with in the classroom. Therefore it is necessary for the staff of the district, school, grade level or subject area to interpret these broad aims into more specific institutional objectives. Such objectives should meet these criteria:

a. applicable to all or most learners in Delano
b. defined in such a way that the learner's achievement toward the objective can be assessed
c. be of such importance to an understanding of the field that they encourage further exploration
d. that in a stated amount of time a learner can formulate a new attitude, develop a new skill, and/or acquire additional knowledge
e. be possible to derive a learning activity from the objective

2. Select alternative content and/or process for an area of study.

There are several contents (bodies of knowledge) that relate to the study of any subject matter field. There are processes (ways of arriving at conclusions) selected for an area of study, e. g. inquiry, value clarification. The task of the planners on the institutional level is to select those most suitable to the objectives.

3. Select a range of procedures and instruments.

(A) TO DIAGNOSE LEARNERS IN AN AREA OF STUDY
(B) TO EVALUATE LEARNERS IN AN AREA OF STUDY, AND
(C) TO ASSESS THE PROGRAM

One of the most difficult tasks in teaching is diagnosis and evaluation, mainly because most instruments (standardized tests)

are so general that specific diagnosis is impossible. Similarly few procedures are adequate in producing reliable information about the learners achievement. Because of the lack of reliable procedures and instruments most teachers ignore diagnosing the student to see if he needs instruction in a skill area. Evaluation often only proves the learner knows the answer process, and avoids checking him on his ability to use the skill he is supposed to have learned. Among the criteria for the selection of and/or designing of the assessment materials are:

a. do they measure the stated objectives?
b. do they meet the standard criteria for evaluation instruments, i.e. validity, reliability?
c. are they practical -- can they be managed in the classroom, can we afford them, and are they worth it?
d. are a variety of devices and procedures provided, i.e. interviews, anecdotal records, standardized tests, etc.?

Even more difficult is the assessment of the program. "Are the learners meeting realistic goals in skill development? Is the behavior of the learner developing in accord with the demands of society? Are the learners better equipped to meet the demands of their society and environment?" Questions such as these must be asked and necessary revisions continually be made in the program. If these revisions are to be based on reliable data, ways of assessing the program must be developed.

4. Select sequence of content and/or process for an area of study.

At this level sequencing is not as important as other decisions. Some criteria to be considered in sequencing are:

a. the appropriateness of the behavior indicated in the objectives and the content for the age level
b. interest of individuals and groups of students
c. social/cultural experiences of the children
d. prior experiences

This decision relates more to the planning of the total program than it does to a part. Often too much attention is given to content sequence and not enough to student interest or how children really learn in ways that defy research!

5. Select criteria for expendable and non-expendable materials.

The criteria should be appropriate to stated objectives, student interests, financial considerations, and to the over-all program of the district.

6. Select alternative (A) Student learning activities, and (B) Materials for instruction.

A wide variety of materials and learning activities will be compiled into a list from which a teacher could select for specific purposes.

7. Construct options for the organization of teachers and learners.

Various organizational systems are currently in vogue in education, e.g., open-space, team-teaching, modular scheduling, non-graded, extended day, family grouping. Various forms are explored and a variety of possible organizations for teachers should be made available. Certain teachers will find that their work is facilitated and their success enhanced by one organization, while other teachers may operate best in some other organization. Several possibilities should be available for both teachers and learners.

Learners may be arranged so that they have options as to teachers, subject material, or classroom organization; e. g., teaming modular scheduling, departmentalization, use of para-professionals. Currently some of these may seem impractical. However, we should keep in mind that different students operate more efficiently in different kinds of settings.[1]

Four observations about this faculty-developed plan:

1. Only a portion of their total work has been summarized above; -- they dealt with the whole of decision making -- societal, institutional, instructional -- because they came to see that separating their considerations caused an unrealistic view of decision making.

2. Participants in the Field Studies Program were reasonably free to develop their agenda and in each site there came to be a strong emphasis on giving greater attention to institutional level matters because participants increasingly saw the relationship of decisions made at that level to the quality of instruction.

3. Open ended questioning was the principal technique used by consultants to the project. This technique was deliberately selected to cause an increasing

[1] All of the above is taken from "A Decision Making Plan" produced in 1972 by the CSI Council in the Delano, California Public Schools. Copies of the complete document, if available, can be obtained from the Council by writing to them, C/O the Delano Public Schools.

independence from the "outsiders" and more dependence on local solving of problems.[2]

4. Some training, provided on a "need basis," in basic curriculum development was important to teacher participants because they saw a direct correlation of it to the quality of the plans they produced.

"SUCCESSFUL" GROUPS IN INSTITUTIONAL DECISION MAKING

The UES study[3] is germain to this discussion because it described the curriculum procedures and the processes used by groups working at the institutional level and attempted some valuing of those two dimensions based on quality of product.

Of the three groups observed one had a superior curricular product as judged on three criteria -- the *precision* of their statements of institutional objectives, the *significance* of the objectives selected, and the *attainability*

[2] Two comments about the technique. First, participants, particularly during the first year, were frustrated and distrustful because of open ended questions. When they came to recognize that the consultants had no unrevealed agendas, the process was accepted. At the end of three years, participants attributed much of the success of the project to the open behavior of the consultants. Second, all of this is not to say that the consultants to the project were empty-headed! For example, many questions were put which caused participants to deal with local data in new ways or to cause people to see clearer relationships between ends and means or to help people develop their own rationale for problem solving.

[3] Robert M. McClure, "Procedures, Processes, and Products in Curriculum Development," unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1965.

of them for the learners for whom the purposes were developed. Given that each group had generally the same resources and restraints to accomplish the tasks, the question then became what differentiated the group with the superior product from those with less adequate products?

The successful group followed a defined curriculum rationale more closely than did the other two. It gave careful attention to at least two sources of data -- "society" and "the learner" -- and gave at least some consideration to a third source --"organized knowledge." They also paid closer attention to the literature and research findings related to these important sources of curricular input. The successful group seemed better able to use information about the children presently in their classrooms in connection with the literature about children in general. They seemed to have the ability to synthesize data directly related to the school with data in the literature about society. No other group made such a conscious effort to utilize information from both their immediate surroundings and from the literature concerning more general topics about society.

The successful group also proceeded to "validate" their objectives in a more consistent manner than did the others. In addition to informal discussions about values, they consciously used their own defined set of values to establish priorities, cut down the total number of objectives, and make objectives within their statement of institutional purposes consistent with each other. There was strong indication that the successful group was better able to concentrate on basic curricular tasks than were the other two groups. It is also interesting that the group spent the most time of the three on the total project -- they worked harder and longer.

The table below summarizes the amounts of time spent by the three groups in various curricular tasks, as each developed a statement of institutional purpose.

TABLE 1

PERCENTAGE OF TIME SPENT BY THE THREE GROUPS IN DISCUSSING VARIOUS CURRICULAR TOPICS

Curricular Topics	Most Successful		Least Successful		Moderately Successful	
	Hours	Percentage	Hours	Percentage	Hours	Percentage
Society	1.8	9.3	.7	4.0	2.8	16.2
Learner	4.0	20.3	1.0	6.0	3.5	20.1
Knowledge	2.5	12.8	1.3	8.2	1.3	7.7
Sub-total for the three data sources	(8.3)	(42.4)	(3.0)	(18.2)	(7.6)	(44.0)
Values	2.1	10.9	2.7	16.4	2.0	11.6
Psychology	1.9	9.7	1.2	7.4	1.1	6.4
Sub-total for the two validating screens	(4.0)	(20.6)	(3.9)	(23.8)	(3.1)	(18.0)
Precision and clarification of statements	5.1	26.0	3.6	22.4	1.5	8.3
Procedures	1.6	8.1	3.5	21.2	3.0	17.4
Extraneous matters	.5	2.9	2.3	14.4	2.1	12.3
Total	19.5	100	16.3	100	17.3	100

The assessment technique used in the UES Study was not sufficiently precise or comprehensive to reveal clearly enough directions in the problem

solving area. A few summary remarks based on the available data[4] and sustained observations by the researcher:

1. The successful group passed its *leadership* from one person to another with competency in the area under discussion as the chief criterion for determining who the leader was at any given time.

2. Participants in the successful group demonstrated in many ways their feelings of *power* to influence the shape of the institution. Members of less successful groups just as clearly demonstrated their feelings of powerlessness in making a difference -- at least through the institutional task described in the study.

3. There is some evidence that members of the successful group *understood* each other better than did members in less successful groups. (For example, they recalled what each other had said in previous meetings or built on the ideas of others in the group.)

4. Members of the successful group perceived that there was a high *relationship between institutional planning and instructional activities;* members of the less successful groups did not as clearly see such relationships.

[4] The methodology used in the study to record the group process was based on: Robert F. Bales, Interaction Process Analysis: A Method for the Study of Small Groups (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Press, 1950).

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The quality of decisions made by the teacher at the instructional level will be improved when identification is made of those decision points unique to the institution as a whole. If we were dealing with an easily observable relationship between input and outcome, this intermediate point could be described as a simple bridge between top and bottom. Many organizations have manuals which give such direction. They provide for their middle management standardized documents which reduce the aims of top management and governing bodies into operations that middle men (such as foreman) can comprehend, act upon, and use to give supervision to workers. There are those who view schools in this way. (Witness, for example, some of the legal requirements that purport to bring about greater accountability which are based on such a simple model.)

But, as Ralph Tyler reminds us, schooling is a purposeful *human* enterprise with consciously willed ends. The processes by which the school is shaped, then, must be based on a *human* dimension, and not on a how-to-do-it manual which is appropriate -- but only in organizations which differ significantly in purpose from the schools.

The now basic research in social psychology[5] and much of the new research in organizational or institutional psychology/sociology[6] point up the positive relationship of man participating in goal setting and his increased productivity

[5] See, for example, L. Coch and J. R. P. French, "Overcoming Resistance to Change," Human Relations, 1948, #1, and Kurt Lewin, "Group Decisions and Social Change" in Readings in Social Psychology, ed. by Maccoby, Newcomb, Hartley (3rd ed.; New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1958).

[6] See, for example, Gordon L. Lippitt, Leslie E. This, and Robert G. Bidwell, Jr. Optimizing Human Resources (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1972).

because he has commitment to purposes he has helped to identify and establish. Teachers, curriculum people, principals, and others charged by various governing groups with conducting school must first be translators of societal expectations into institutional goals. In almost all cases the acts of translating require great skill (see the Phi Delta Kappa training material on goal setting, for example) because not only are the governing publics not required to be articulate in their setting of purposes, but also because we have evidence that there is a desire on the layman's part to be shown alternatives to traditional societal goals.

An essential task of institutional decision making, then, is to bring sharply into focus the desires, needs, and mandates of the community the school serves.

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